



Testimony of
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Higher Education & Employment Advancement Committee
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SB 251 An Act Expanding Training Programs for Careers in Health Care

Good afternoon Senator Slap, Representative Elliott and members of the Higher Education & Employment Advancement Committee. My name is Ed Hawthorne, and I am proud to serve as the President of the Connecticut AFL-CIO, a federation of hundreds of local unions representing more than 200,000 workers in the private sector, public sector, and building trades. Our members live and work in every city and town in our state and reflect the diversity that makes Connecticut great. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 251 An Act Expanding Training Programs for Careers in Health Care.

The existing shortage of Connecticut nurses and other health care professionals is critical and demands immediate action. The shortages hospitals and other health care facilities were beginning to experience before the pandemic have been profoundly exacerbated by COVID-19. The jobs have become more taxing than they ever were before, and many workers feel like they are drowning. Intense levels of physical and emotional stress and burnout have caused many to reevaluate their priorities and attempt to find positions that allow for a better work/life balance. Some have left the profession all together. Others are preparing to retire in coming years, but the next generation of health care workers is not large enough, nor experienced enough, to fill the gaps retirees will leave behind.

SB 251 creates a major step forward in addressing these shortages. However, in order to be most effective, we encourage the Committee to provide representation of frontline healthcare workers in developing these workforce initiatives. They have firsthand, direct knowledge of the problems that exist and barriers to recruitment and retention. It would be a missed opportunity not to include their experience and expertise in these endeavors.

In addition, we urge the Committee and the General Assembly to take action on measures that can immediately address the workforce shortages, notably by prohibiting mandatory overtime which makes it impossible for health care workers to balance professional and personal responsibilities and mandating appropriate nurse-patient staffing ratios which would ensure nurses have reasonable workloads and can effectively deliver high quality patient care. Lastly, we encourage you to support legislation, such as SB 163 An Act Protecting Employee Freedom of Speech and Conscience, which would make it easier for health care workers to have a voice on the job by allowing them to join a union free from employer harassment and intimidation.

We urge the Committee to support this bill with the inclusion of frontline health care workers. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.